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"We Are Your Friends"

Remarks by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Washington, December 17, 1979

Mr President, thank you very much for your warm welcome and for the very generous terms in which you expressed it. I am delighted to be back in Washington and to have the opportunity of meeting you, Mr. President, and many other friends once again.

I don't need to dwell on the emotion which any British Prime Minister must feel on taking part in this ceremony on the White House lawn for the first time. The United States is the most powerful force for freedom and democracy the world over, and we salute and we honour you.

Our meeting, Mr. President, extends a long and historic series. The friendship between our two countries stretches far into the past. It rests on a natural affinity and affection which stand above the buffetings of fate and fortune. The relationship, as you have said, Mr. President, is indeed an exceptional one. It is exceptional in its ease. It is exceptional in its durability. It is exceptional in its consequences, and I look to see it deepened further in the talks that we are about to begin.

Mr. President, this isn't an easy time for the United States and I want you to know that every British home has followed anxiously the events of the last six weeks in Tehran. The cruel ordeal inflicted on the hostages has aroused the indignation of the civilized world and our hearts go out to the hostages and our thoughts are with them and their families here.

Our admiration goes to the American people for their patience and wisdom and self control. You yourself, Mr. President if I may say so, have won enormous respect in Britain for the statesmanship, calmness, and courage with which you have faced an agonizing problem. At times like this you are entitled to look to your friends for support. We are your friends. We do support you. And we shall support you. Let there be no doubt about that. (Applause).

Mr. President, as well as the grievous events in Iran there is much to discuss. For example, Rhodesia, which you have mentioned, where we are deeply grateful for your understanding and support throughout the negotiations and not least in the last few days, on defence, where we applaud the programme that you have just announced and where we take our full part in the modernization of the theatre nuclear forces in NATO, on energy and economic problems where we are both actively seeking to control inflation and to use our resources better, and on Europe, where I will tell you of my confidence that the Community will resolve its present difficulties and emerge a stronger partner for the United States.

After this splendid welcoming ceremony, Mr. President, for which I do indeed thank you, I look forward to tackling our formidable agenda and on reaching a broad measure of agreement. We bring you affectionate greetings and good wishes to all the people of the United States of America. (Applause). ■

Source

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